

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:
  - ~~\_\_\_\_\_ exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;~~
  - ~~\_\_\_\_\_ subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and~~
  - ~~\_\_\_\_\_ transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,~~
  - ~~\_\_\_\_\_ wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:~~
  - ~~\_\_\_\_\_ a first step of transferring said substrate, from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;~~
  - ~~\_\_\_\_\_ a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and~~
  - ~~\_\_\_\_\_ a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber; and~~
  - ~~\_\_\_\_\_ wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from at least the chamber in which said substrate is present among said three chambers at least during a period in which said substrate is present during said three steps of said substrate transferring step~~
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a first step of carrying a substrate into a preliminary chamber from an external part;
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a second step of continuously supplying and exhausting an inert gas to and from said preliminary chamber at least from a time before opening a first gate valve between

said preliminary chamber and a transfer chamber, after the substrate is carried into said preliminary chamber;

\_\_\_\_\_ a third step of transferring said substrate to said transfer chamber from said preliminary chamber, in a state in which the inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber and said transfer chamber, after said first gate valve is opened;

\_\_\_\_\_ a fourth step of transferring said substrate to a process chamber from said transfer chamber in a state in which the inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from said transfer chamber and said process chamber, after a second gate valve between said transfer chamber and said process chamber is opened; and

\_\_\_\_\_ a fifth step of subjecting said substrate to predetermined processing in said process chamber.

2. (Previously Presented) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;  
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and  
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:

a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber; and

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from all of said three chambers during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

3. (Currently Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;  
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and  
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:

a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied to ~~at least the chamber~~ all of said chambers coupled to a vacuum pump among said three chambers and exhausted from this chamber using said vacuum pump during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

4. (Previously Presented) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 1, wherein the exchange of the substrate between said preliminary chamber and the outside is carried out with a cassette that holds a plurality of substrates.

5. (Previously Presented) The semiconductor method according to claim 1, wherein the predetermined processing to which the substrate is subjected in said process chamber is HSG formation or epitaxial growth.

6. (Currently Amended) A substrate processing method, comprising ~~the steps of:~~

~~\_\_\_\_\_ exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_ subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_ transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber;~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_ wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the, following three steps:~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_ a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_ a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_ a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber; and~~  
~~\_\_\_\_\_ wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from at least the chamber in which said substrate is present among said three chambers at least during a period in which said substrate is present during said three steps of said substrate transferring step~~  
\_\_\_\_\_ a first step of carrying a substrate into a preliminary chamber from an external part;  
\_\_\_\_\_ a second step of continuously supplying and exhausting an inert gas to and from said preliminary chamber at least from a time before opening a first gate between said preliminary chamber and a transfer chamber, after the substrate is carried into said preliminary chamber;  
\_\_\_\_\_ a third step of transferring said substrate to said transfer chamber from said preliminary chamber, in a state in which the inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber and said transfer chamber, after said first gate valve is opened;

a fourth step of transferring said substrate to a process chamber from said transfer chamber in a state in which the inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from said transfer chamber and said process chamber, after a second gate valve between said transfer chamber and said process chamber is opened; and

a fifth step of subjecting said substrate to predetermine processing in said process chamber.

7. (Canceled)

8. (Canceled)

9. (Currently Amended) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part; subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein said substrate transferring step comprises the following three steps:

a first step of transferring said substrate from said preliminary chamber to said transfer chamber;

a second step of holding in said transfer chamber said substrate transferred to said transfer chamber; and

a third step of transferring said substrate from said transfer chamber to said process chamber, and

wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and in this vacuum pump, ~~a continuous gas flow is maintained from an upstream side to a downstream side of this vacuum pump~~ an inert gas is continuously introduced into the vacuum pump from an upstream side of the vacuum pump, and the vacuum pump operates to

exhaust the inert gas in all the chambers, during said three steps of said substrate transferring step.

10. (Previously Presented) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;  
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and  
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber,

wherein an inert gas is continuously supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber during said substrate transferring step.

11. (Previously Presented) A semiconductor manufacturing method, comprising the steps of:

exchanging a substrate between a preliminary chamber and an external part;  
subjecting the substrate to predetermined processing in a process chamber; and  
transferring the substrate through a transfer chamber provided between said preliminary chamber and said process chamber, the method further comprising the step of:

continuously supplying and exhausting an inert gas to and from the preliminary chamber during a period in which the substrate is present within said preliminary chamber after the substrate is transferred into said preliminary chamber.

12. (Currently Amended) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 1, wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and this vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from ~~at least said chamber in which the substrate is present.~~

13. (Currently Amended) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 2, wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and this

vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from ~~at least~~ all of said chambers.

14. (Previously Presented) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 3, wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to all of said three chambers.

15. (Currently Amended) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 6, wherein at least one vacuum pump is coupled to said three chambers, and this vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from ~~at least~~ said chamber ~~in which the substrate is present~~.

16. (Previously Presented) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 10, wherein a vacuum pump is coupled to at least said preliminary chamber among said three chambers, and this vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber.

17. (Previously Presented) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 11, wherein a vacuum pump is coupled to at least said preliminary chamber among said three chambers, and this vacuum pump is used when the inert gas is supplied and exhausted to and from said preliminary chamber.

18. (Previously Presented) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 10, wherein a cassette holding the plural substrates is used for the exchange of the substrate between said preliminary chamber and the external part, and the cassette holding the plural substrates is transferred into said preliminary chamber.

19. (Previously Presented) The semiconductor manufacturing method according to claim 11, wherein a cassette holding the plural substrates is used for the exchange of the substrate between said preliminary chamber and the external part, and the cassette holding the plural substrates is transferred into said preliminary chamber.